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S E C R E T ROME 001100

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA AND EUR

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SUBJECT: IRANIAN AMBASSADOR TELLS GOI IRAN WOULDN'T MIND
SEEING SADDAM GO

REF: ROME 854

CLASSIFIED BY: DCM EMIL SKODON. REASON:1.5 (B)(D)

(S) DURING COURSE OF DISCUSSION ON OTHER TOPICS, PRIME MINISTER BERLUSCONI'S DIPLOMATIC ADVISOR, AMBASSADOR GIOVANNI CASTELLANETA, PROVIDED DCM WITH BRIEF READOUT OF HIS EARLY MARCH MEETING WITH IRANIAN AMBASSADOR TO ITALY BAHRAM GHASEMI. THE MEETING TOOK PLACE AT GHASEMI'S REQUEST, IN CASTELLANETA'S OFFICE.

(S) GHASEMI TOLD CASTELLANETA THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WAS CONVINCED THE USG HAD ALREADY DECIDED TO ATTACK IRAQ, BUT WOULD NOT DO SO UNTIL AFTER THE SHIA HOLY DAY OF ASHURA ON 16 MARCH (SIC -- OUR CALENDAR SHOWS ASHURA ON THE 14TH). GHASEMI SAID THAT THE IRANIAN GOVERNMENT WOULDN'T MIND SEEING SADDAM DEPART THE SCENE, BUT HAD TWO RED LINES FOR ANY USG-LED MILITARY ACTION. FIRST, IRAN COULD NOT BE PERCEIVED AS COOPERATING WITH THE U.S. SECOND, THE MOJAHEDIN-E KHALG (MEK) WOULD HAVE TO BE RESTRAINED AND COULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO EXPLOIT THE SITUATION TO ATTACK IRAN. GHASEMI ALSO SAID THAT A FEW WEEKS PREVIOUSLY THE IRAQI FORMIN HAD VISITED TEHERAN WITH AN OFFER TO SHUT DOWN THE MEK IF TEHERAN AGREED TO COOPERATE WITH BAGHDAD AGAINST U.S. AGGRESSION. THE IRANIAN GOVERNMENT TURNED DOWN THE OFFER.

(S) CASTELLANETA TOLD DCM THAT GHASEMI HAD GIVEN NO INDICATION WHETHER HE WAS SPEAKING PRIVATELY OR ON INSTRUCTIONS. CASTELLANETA ALSO SAID THAT HE TOOK THE OCCASION TO STRESS TO THE IRANIAN AMBASSADOR THE NEED FOR DEMOCRATIC REFORMS WITHIN IRAN AND TO REPEAT ITALIAN CONCERNS ABOUT IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM, BUT RECEIVED ONLY THE STANDARD IRANIAN ANSWERS TO BOTH ISSUES.

SEMBLER

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